STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DANIEL K. AKAKA

Work-life Programs: Attracting, Retaining, and Empowering the Federal Workforce

Hearing

Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Thank you all for being here today as the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia meets to examine how worklife programs can support Federal employees and improve government operations.

It is fitting that we are addressing these issues during Public Service Recognition Week. This week is set aside each year to honor the dedicated public servants who provide vital services to our Nation. Public Service Recognition Week is also an opportunity to showcase the many attractive careers in public service. As we showcase these careers, we must also make sure the Federal Government is an employer of choice and offers a competitive benefits package.

The American workforce faces a new set of challenges. As costs have risen and wages have lagged, fewer families can afford to rely on a single income, and many parents juggle busy work schedules and child care responsibilities. Workers of all ages find themselves leaving work for night classes, as professions that once required a high school or undergraduate education now demand advanced degrees.

In addition, almost 50 percent of the Federal workforce will be eligible for retirement in the next five years. Younger workers may have different work expectations than previous generations and may value workplace flexibility more than traditional fringe benefits. The Federal government needs to adapt, just as the private sector has, to attract and retain the next generation of Federal workers. Work-life programs help agencies compete in the marketplace.

Offering our employees options – like flexible schedules, the ability to telework, and access to wellness programs – improves employees' quality of life and increases productivity.

This winter, this area experienced three blizzards. Those storms strongly reinforced the importance of telework for productivity and continuity of operations. Because of these benefits, Senator Voinovich and I introduced the Telework Enhancement Act (S. 707) last year. I look forward to finalizing that bill and to learning about other ways Congress can support work-life programs.

Recently at the Workplace Flexibility Forum, President Obama noted that companies with flexible work arrangements often have lower turnover and absenteeism, along with higher productivity and healthier workers. The President also cited a recent report on work-life balance and the economics of workplace flexibility.

I am pleased to have one of the authors of this report, Cecilia Rouse from the President's Council of Economic Advisors, here to discuss their research on the economics of work-life programs. I look forward to hearing from Dr. Rouse about how these policies benefit not only employees, but also employers and the economy as a whole.

I also look forward to hearing from all our witnesses about the efforts being made to provide work-life programs to Federal employees, as well as suggestions to better use these programs to support our workforce, attract the best people to public service, and make the Federal government the employer of choice in this country.

The Federal government is the largest employer in the United States, and we can lead by example. This week – Public Service Recognition Week – we celebrate those men and women who make a commitment to serve their government in the military or civilian service. We can do more to honor their service every day by empowering employees to be innovative, live healthier, and strive to be their best – both at work and at home.

I thank you all, again, for being here today.